

November 9, 1999

The Issue Isn't Education Funding

Whose Money Is It, Mr. President?

The Republican Congress and President Clinton no longer disagree over how much the federal government should spend on education. Now the debate is about who should decide how to spend the people's education dollars, the feds or parents and local educators? Yesterday the President made clear he cannot give up control of what rightfully are local decisions.

The Senate soon will vote on a Republican education amendment that includes the Teacher Empowerment Act. This bill would join the Eisenhower Professional Development Program and the "classroom size" initiative into a single, flexible grant to states to promote high-quality instruction through whatever reforms meet the needs of individual schools, including:

- Class size reduction
- Teacher testing
- Implementing merit-based teacher performance systems
- Developing alternative methods of teacher certification
- Teacher mentoring
- Tenure reform

The Republican Teacher Empowerment Act allows local educators to decide where these funds would best be spent, rather than having well-meaning but ignorant Washington bureaucrats require them to spend funds where they may not be needed.

In contrast, President Clinton is determined to run all schools from Washington, D.C. Worse, he now fancies himself Lord of the Manor, chiding the poor serfs who actually do the work of educating children. Yesterday President Clinton reminded local educators why they should obey their betters in Washington:

Clinton told reporters that the federal money for new teachers does not belong to states and local school districts. "It's not their money," he said. "If they don't want the money, they don't have to take it. If they're offended by it, they can give it to other states and other school districts." (11/9/99, Washington Post)

Actually, that money does belong to the American people, who deserve more say in how it is spent than they are granted by this Education Department and this White House.

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